

Today, I introduced the *Lena Horne Recognition Act*, a bill to posthumously honor Lena Horne with a Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of her many achievements and contributions to American culture and the Civil Rights Movement. A symbol of elegance and grace, the legendary Lena Horne entertained America and broke racial barriers as a singer, dancer, and actress for over 60 years. Ms. Horne passed away a year ago yesterday, in New York City on May 9, 2010 at the age of 92.

Lena Mary Calhoun Horne was born on June 30, 1917, in Brooklyn, New York. Her path to international stardom would take her from Harlem's famous Cotton Club, where she was hired as a chorus dancer at the age of 16, to Charlie Barnet's jazz band, where she became one of the first African American women to tour with an all-white band, to Hollywood and Broadway.

In the 1940s, Ms. Horne was discovered by a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) talent scout and moved to Hollywood to be an actress, becoming the first black artist to sign a long-term contract with a major studio. Despite her extraordinary beauty and talent, however, she was often limited to minor acting roles because of her race. Among many lost opportunities, studio executives cast fellow actress Ava Gardner as Julie in the film adaptation of *Show Boat* instead of Ms. Horne because they did not want it to star a black actress. However, she dazzled audiences and critics in a number of films, including

Cabin in the Sky

and

Stormy Weather

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The struggle for equal and fair treatment was an inseparable and increasingly political part of Ms. Horne's life. During World War II, Ms. Horne toured extensively with the United Service Organizations (USO) on the West Coast and in the South in support of the troops. She was outspoken in her criticism of the way black soldiers were treated, refusing to sing for segregated audiences or to groups in which German prisoners of war were seated in front of African American servicemen.

During the period of McCarthyism in the 1950s, Ms. Horne was blacklisted as a communist for seven years because of her civil rights activism and friendship with Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois. Although she continued to face discrimination, Ms. Horne's career flourished in television and on nightclub stages across the country. It was during this time that she also established herself as a major recording artist. In 1957, she recorded Lena Horne at the *Waldorf-Astoria*

, which reached the Top 10 and became the best-selling album by a female singer in RCA Victor's history.

Ms. Horne used her talent and fame to become a powerful voice for civil rights and equality. In 1963, she participated in the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, at which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his immortal "I Have a Dream" speech. She also performed at rallies throughout the country for the National Council for Negro Women and worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), of which she was the cover girl for their monthly bulletin at the age of 2, in addition to being a member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

In 1981, Ms. Horne finally received the big break she had waited for her whole life – a one-woman Broadway show. Lena Horne: *The Lady and Her Music*, was the culmination of her triumphs and struggles. It enjoyed a 14-month run before going on tour and earned her a special Tony award for distinguished achievement in theater and two Grammys. Ms. Horne was also the recipient of the Kennedy Center honor for lifetime contribution to the arts in 1984 and in 1989 received a lifetime achievement Grammy Award. She received two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame – for her work in both motion pictures and recording – in addition to a footprint on the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site.

Lena Horne was an extraordinary woman who refused to give up her dreams and used her beauty, talent, and intelligence to fight racial discrimination. I urge my colleagues to support the Lena Horne Recognition Act to honor the life and legacy of Ms. Lena Horne with a Congressional Gold Medal.

Joining Hastings as original co-sponsors of the legislative include (23): Representatives Bachus (AL), Frank (MA), Baca (CA), Brown (FL), Christensen (VI), Clarke (NY), Davis (IL), Fudge (OH), Grijalva (AZ), Conyers (MI), Hinchey (NY), Jackson Lee (TX), Lowey (NY), Meeks (NY), Norton (DC), Rangel (NY), Rohrabacher (CA), Roybal-Allard (CA), Ruppertsberger (MD), Scott (VA), Serrano (NY), Thompson (MS), and West (FL)

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